

Open-a-Center Checklist

What to Know Before Signing a Lease

You found a space. It looks promising. The rent seems possible. The location feels right. You can already imagine classrooms, cubbies, children's artwork, and families walking through the door.

Before you sign the lease, pause.

Not every building can become a child care center. A space may look perfect but still have zoning, licensing, safety, cost, or layout problems.

Use this checklist before you sign, pay a deposit, start renovations, or announce your opening date.

1. Check zoning before anything else

A landlord may say, "A daycare should be fine here," but zoning rules may say something different.

Ask:

- Is child care allowed at this address?
- Is a special permit required?
- Are there parking or traffic restrictions?
- Are there neighborhood approval steps?
- Are there rules for signs, outdoor play, or building use?

Tip: Get zoning information in writing when possible.

2. Understand licensing space requirements

Child care licensing rules may affect how many children you can serve.

Ask:

- How much usable classroom space is available?
- How many children could each room serve?
- Does outdoor space count or need approval?



- Are bathrooms and sinks close enough?
- Are there separate areas for different age groups?
- Are infant, toddler, preschool, or school-age spaces set up correctly?

Reminder: A building that looks large may still have a lower licensed capacity than you expect.

3. Look closely at bathrooms and sinks

Bathrooms matter a lot in child care.

Ask:

- Are there enough toilets?
- Are sinks accessible to children?
- Are bathrooms close to classrooms?
- Would plumbing changes be needed?
- Are diapering areas needed?
- Are staff bathrooms available?

Tip: Plumbing updates can be expensive, so review this early.

4. Review outdoor play space

Outdoor space is often a key licensing and program requirement.

Ask:

- Is there a safe outdoor area?
- Is it fenced?
- Is the ground surface safe?
- Is there shade?
- Is equipment included or needed?
- Can children reach the play area safely?
- Would the space meet licensing expectations?

Reminder: If there is no outdoor play area, ask whether your state allows alternatives.

5. Study drop-off, pick-up, and parking

Families need safe and easy access.

Ask:

- Is there enough parking?



- Can parents safely drop off and pick up children?
- Is traffic heavy during opening and closing times?
- Are sidewalks, entrances, and exits safe?
- Would neighbors or other tenants complain about traffic?
- Can emergency vehicles access the building?

Tip: A great classroom space can still fail if drop-off and pick-up are unsafe or stressful.

6. Walk through the building like a teacher

Imagine a full day in the center.

Ask:

- Can teachers supervise children easily?
- Are rooms shaped in a way that supports classroom flow?
- Are there blind spots?
- Is there enough storage?
- Is there a place for staff breaks?
- Is there a place for meals or snacks?
- Is there an office or parent meeting space?
- Are entrances secure?

Reminder: A child care center must work for children, staff, and families every day.

7. Estimate renovation and build-out costs

A low rent may not matter if the space needs major updates.

Possible costs may include:

- sinks
- bathrooms
- walls or classroom divisions
- flooring
- fencing
- playground equipment
- fire safety updates
- security systems
- kitchen or food prep areas
- accessibility updates
- paint, furniture, and supplies

Tip: Ask contractors for estimates before signing when possible.



8. Review the lease terms carefully

A lease can affect your business for years.

Ask:

- How long is the lease?
- Is there an option to renew?
- Can the lease be transferred if you sell later?
- Who pays for repairs?
- Who pays for improvements?
- Are child care operations specifically allowed?
- Are there limits on hours of operation?
- What happens if licensing is not approved?

Reminder: Have an attorney review the lease before signing.

9. Build a realistic opening timeline

Opening a child care center usually takes longer than people expect.

Your timeline may include:

- zoning review
- licensing application
- inspections
- renovations
- staff hiring
- staff training
- furniture and equipment setup
- marketing
- enrollment
- final approvals

Tip: Do not promise families an opening date until your timeline is realistic.

10. Make sure the numbers work

The property must fit your business plan.

Ask:

- What is the monthly rent?
- What are utilities and insurance likely to cost?



- How much will renovations cost?
- How many children can the space realistically serve?
- What tuition rates will you charge?
- How many staff will you need?
- How long can you afford to operate before enrollment is full?

Reminder: Capacity affects revenue. Revenue affects staffing. Staffing affects whether your center can stay open.

Thinking about opening a child care center?

If you found a property, are searching for a space, or need help understanding licensing, facility setup, staffing, training, or opening steps, **Request Your Free Consultation**. Complete the [Private Child Care Business Buyer/Seller Interest Form](#).

Before you sign the lease, make sure the space and the plan are strong.

